

Getting Started in Commercial Photography with John H. Siskin

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If you'd like me to critique your assignment you can arrange that at my website. Please visit www.siskinphoto.com/workshop.php. I suppose you could also make a donation at the site.

Lesson #1: Product Photography

Welcome to Week 1!

The thing about assignment photography is that it is really just a form of communication. In order to sell a thing, or promote it, the potential buyer needs to know all about the thing: size, color capabilities and so on.

Our job as photographers is to give them that information while still making an attractive photograph. Of course, because this is essentially an economic venture, we will want to do this efficiently, and we will want to control our investment in tools. You may be able to buy cheaper tools, but limitations on the work you can do can make cheap tools more costly. Although this class doesn't concern itself with equipment in the way some of my other classes do I am willing to help with any equipment questions you may have.

One thing I should mention: light panels. I use these a lot. You can find plans for building them on the Articles and Tips link at Campus Square. I would suggest building these, but you can buy them also.

A couple of essential expendables. First **gaffers tape**, the single most useful item for holding it all together. This is similar to duct tape but better, because it is easier to remove. This tape is available from photo sources (Calumet or B&H on line). Another item that you might like to have is called **cinfoil**, which is black aluminum foil. You can use it to manipulate a light source without worrying about the risk of fire. Many modeling lights are very hot and fire is a real risk. Other things that belong on this list are the essentials for your camera: **lenses**, **film** or **digital capture media**, perhaps a **tripod**. When we get to architectural and industrial work you will want gels to change the color of your light. Rosco makes **tuf gels** that don't burn, good thing. You get the idea.



Title: Tomato Soup
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One reason for this list, beyond helping you to shop intelligently, is that the list can help you to make sure you bring the right things on location. 2 more items that I need for product photography, and I think you will too: **seamless paper and tracing paper**. Seamless is used as background paper for photography. For product, I usually get the rolls that are 4.5 feet wide by 33 feet long. Most of what you'll use is white, but you may want a light color also. You'll use tracing paper when you want to light from below or the back. This helps to make a shadowless environment; we'll talk about this later in the lesson.

Bob

We need to examine how the tools for this: umbrellas, softboxes and light panels work. We have Bob to help us with this.



Bob #1

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Bob Set-up #1

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The first shot finds Bob on top of a white column (actually all the shots will find Bob in the same place, Bob is unchanging). Bob is illuminated by a single light, a Norman 200B. The thing you want to pay attention to is the bright white spot on Bob; this is the specular highlight. On a small light source the specular highlight is always very intense. Not only is it bright, it is concentrated. The brightness difference between the specular highlight and the diffused highlight (the area which is illuminated but not the specular highlight) is greater than it would be if the light source were larger.

Next, examine the way that the diffused highlight transitions into shadow. That transition is very abrupt. Because of these characteristics, a small light source is very good at revealing texture in an object. Because of the intense specular highlights a small light creates it also creates sparkle; sparkle would be a lot of very small specular highlights.

Although I almost never use a small light source by itself, I often use it in combination with large light sources to add sparkle and texture that are lost with big light sources. I should note that this looks different from a medium sized light source because 2 sources softens or adds shadow/sparkle while a medium sized light doesn't have the small specular highlights.



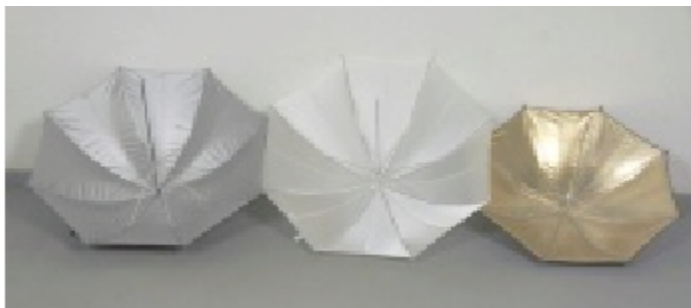
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Bob Set-up #2
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The first lighting tool I got was an umbrella. I still think that umbrellas are the best all around lighting tool you can get. They are very inexpensive, bordering on cheap. Umbrellas are easy to set-up, unlike a softbox. If you knock your light over they even act as a parachute! They spread light the way a sawed-off-shotgun spreads pellets, only more so. Heck, if you use a shoot through umbrella (white umbrella with no cover) you can create 360° light! Really only two draw backs, 1) they light everything there is no stopping them, and 2) they leave telltale reflections all over the shiny stuff in your shot. You can see that I used an umbrella when you look at Bob, because the specular highlight is now shaped like an umbrella. Because the umbrella is bigger the specular highlight is bigger and dimmer.

Please note what has happened to the transition to shadow. The transition is much smoother and the shadow is smaller and less intense.



Umbrella 2
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Umbrellas come in a whole range of types; this helps to extend their usefulness. The first characteristic I want to talk about is size. Bigger is better and more expensive. A bigger light source will spread light more

smoothly over a larger area. There is a relationship between the size of the light source (this holds for things other than umbrellas) and the distance from the subject and the way the light looks. Basically if the light source is at a distance of less than twice the size of the light source the lighting will be very smooth.

It is important to keep in mind that if your big light source is a long way from your subject you have made it into a medium or small light source. I have 3 sizes of umbrellas: 60 inch for bigger subjects, 45 inches for most purposes and finally 30 inch for a tight fit on architectural subjects.

Umbrellas are provided with different fabric, which changes their character. The most common fabric is a white satin. It has two advantages, even diffusion of light and good efficiency. The first advantage means that the light is evenly distributed and smooth over the area the umbrella is lighting. The second means that you get a lot of the light you put in an umbrella back. Any time you bounce light, off a ceiling or an umbrella, some of the light doesn't come back, and that means it isn't available for your photograph. When you are willing to sacrifice smoothness for efficiency you can use a silver umbrella, the metal version of these umbrellas are wonderfully efficient.

Umbrellas also come with gold lining and blue lining which do a partial color correction from daylight to tungsten (gold) or tungsten to daylight (blue). You can also use these umbrellas to add color to your shot.

Finally there are differences in umbrella construction. First there are umbrellas that have a removable black cover over the translucent satin fabric with black. This has two advantages: First, the light doesn't come out of the umbrella, illuminating areas you'd rather leave dark; and second, you can remove the cover and light through the umbrella - this is very useful in architectural interiors.

The other difference in umbrella construction is that the white satin covers the ribs in some umbrellas. This cleans up the reflection of the umbrella somewhat and is supposed to create even smoother illumination. The picture of Bob was made with a 45 inch white satin ribless umbrella with a black cover. Man what a mouthful for an umbrella.

Softboxes



Bob #3
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Bob Set-up #3
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When I first opened my studio softboxes were the new thing so I got one. They are a fabric box that encloses the light providing, hopefully, even illumination across the face of the box. The light from a softbox is much more controllable than the light from an umbrella because they have a flat face. In addition to providing an even source, the edges of the area illuminated by the softbox are quite interesting, a controllable falloff. As with the umbrellas the softbox is better if it is big. As the light source backs away from the subject, it acts as an increasingly small light source. Softboxes also have a characteristic specular highlight, just less objectionable than the umbrella.

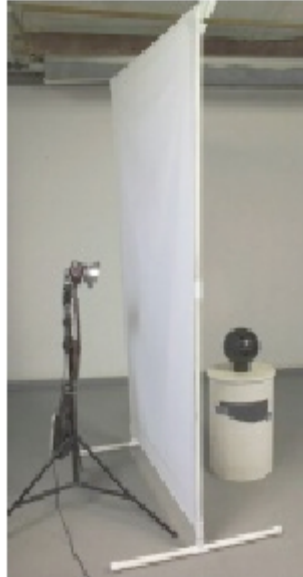
The relationships between the values in the specular highlight and the diffused highlight are similar to those produced with an umbrella, except that a softbox is generally closer to the subject than an umbrella would be. This is because the umbrella is placed away from the light and the subject, while the softbox is between the light and the subject. One thing you want to have in a softbox is different covers so you can change the shape of the light, at least between a rectangle and an oval. This will allow you to change the shape of your specular highlights. One place where a softbox is noticeably superior to any other light diffuser is outdoors on a windy day. It is the easiest light to secure in a wind, but don't forget to secure it!

There is one size of softbox I find useful for product photography. This is the very small box; say 12 inches by 18 inches. I know that this is a contradiction to what I said above, but this is a beautiful size for shooting bottles and glasses; it allows you to control the reflection in the bottle. When you see a shot with a long thin reflection in a bottle of wine, this is often the light source. A lot of people like an overhead soft box for lighting product. This works particularly well in a small space, of course you'll need a boom.

Light Panels



Bob #4
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Bob Set-up #4
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Light panels, these work as very large light sources and they are inexpensive. They are easy to manipulate in the studio and easy to set-up. You can use one to light people or large product. You can clip them together to make an even larger light source; this will work for well very large products. You can also clip them together into a sort of a tent for reflective products. Of course the fabric you use matters to the shot. I generally use cotton broad cloth, it is generally very neutral in color and it hems with glue. Rip-stop nylon is another great fabric for a cover. I also like silver and gold fabrics for reflectors. Another important cover for your frame is black. This will enable you to control the light spilled from the sides of the frame, and it can be used as a gobo or flag to help build shadow and strengthen contrast. You can buy this stuff ready made, both Chimera and Westcott sell fabric the size of the frame plans, heck you can buy the whole frame from them. I have about 5 of these frames and a lot of covers, that's why I recommend making them, the savings on that many is substantial.

There are difficulties with the frames, the biggest is that the light coming through the panel is uneven and the reflection shows the irregularities of the fabric. The photo of Bob shows the first problem pretty well. The light is bright in the center and falls off, sort of like a fireball. Now lots of the time this is fine, even great. It even looks pretty good on Bob. It doesn't work all the time. If you look at the panel you can see why: the light is much brighter in the center than on the sides. Now back to Bob.

Umbrellas & Light Panels



Bob #5
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Bob Set-up #5
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Bounce light off an umbrella, then through a light panel. This set-up provides even and smooth light on the surface of the light panel. It is easy to reposition and manipulate. The smoothness of the transition from diffuse highlight to shadow is just remarkable. Note that the shadow from Bob is just a slight darkening, rather than a pool of inky blackness. Look also at the column and how the light falls off smoothly across the bottom. Now I should mention the specular highlight: first it is very close in value to the diffused highlight ... this is because the light source is so large. Second the highlight doesn't have the telltale image of an umbrella in it. Another point is that the light has now evenly spread to the background, which has not happened in any of the other shots.

One more thing I should point out is that by repositioning the light with respect to the panel you can make useful changes in the light. For instance, if you raise the umbrella and light up the panel will darken as it goes to the floor, this will be reflected in the specular highlight. So is this the wonder light? Well it does have a couple of drawbacks: it sucks up a lot of light, figure you need at least 500 watt-seconds to get a useable f-stop out of this and it leaks light out the sides like mad. I often use another light panel (maybe I should call this a dark panel?) covered with black fabric to control this.

Thanks Bob!

I also want to mention tools for putting direct light on a small area. These are snoots, barn doors and the honeycomb spot, or grid spot. These are important tool for adding sparkle to a specific area of a shot. These tools come in tighter and wider patterns that increase the size of the pattern as the pattern widens. These will allow you to put controlled highlights into a product shot.

Table Top



Product table set-up 3

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I am using a home built table for this first product. The legs have variable height; I got them from Ikea. This is a link to a current product which is similar to what I've used: <http://www.ikea.com/> You should be able to get a similar product at Home Depot. I have placed a piece of clear Plexiglas on top of the legs. On top of that is tracing paper or velum, from an art supply store.

On top of the Plexiglas is tracing paper or velum, from an art supply store. Next I'll put a light below and behind the table.



Product table set-up 1

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Product table set-up 2

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I can light from any side with this, which can be important. I also have complete control over shadows. I like this better than more sophisticated systems because the tracing paper is so easy to replace. I do not need to worry about scratching or marking the tabletop. The next step is to put up light panels and umbrellas, this will give me a chance to have light surround the product, look at the shot at the beginning of this section.

So I have to admit that a box of Cheerios is not a very exciting subject, and I made it duller by shooting straight on. This first shot is with all the lights on the table above at even levels. The bottom light has less power so that it will match the lights with the umbrellas. The second shot has the light on camera left turned off.



Cheerios Table Shot, all lights
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Cheerios table shot, no left
light
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After I turned the left side back on I
turned off the right side and shot this.

You'll note that turning off either of these
lights does not make a big change since
the light bounces around so much that
everything is evened out. Next I turned off
the back light, of course the side lights are
back on now.



Cheerios table shot, no right
light

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Cheerios Table Shot, no back light

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This is a little bit more dramatic change. Finally I turned off the bottom light. I don't suppose that surprises you. This makes the foreground darker, just as the last shot had a darker background.

The table is kind of a pain to set up, but very easy to use. You can do a lot of work with this table very quickly.



Cheerios Table Shot, no bottom light

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Shooting In Raw

Of course, lighting is not the only problem we face in doing photography. We also need to control the color and exposure of our photographs. One of the ways to do this efficiently is to use Raw capture on our cameras. You could have an entire class on how to use raw capture, but now we only need to make this easier, not more complex.

One important thing I have to point out about Raw is that each camera manufacturer has a different raw environment. This means that not

everything I can do in raw will work in your camera. Another point about raw, Adobe has a program in Photoshop called Bridge that will open raw files. Originally this applied corrections to your shots, but that has been fixed. It is very useful for commercial work. There are a few important reasons to use Raw for product shooting. The best reason is that Raw is a simple place for making a change to all the images in a group. For instance, if you shot a color test of a grey card at the beginning of shooting a group of 100 tools you could balance the test using the camera program and apply this color balance to all the other shots.

Additionally, Raw saves extra bit depth, this allows you to change the exposure with no loss in information. This keeps your shadows and highlights cleaner as you change exposure. Raw will also let you choose a level of sharpening, and apply it to all of your shots. Of course you can choose to only modify a small group of shots or just one, rather than the entire shoot. Finally, Raw will change all your images into either jpgs or tiffs. One problem with Raw is that this conversion is usually time consuming, but overall Raw will reduce the time you spend in Photoshop and give you more consistent photographs.

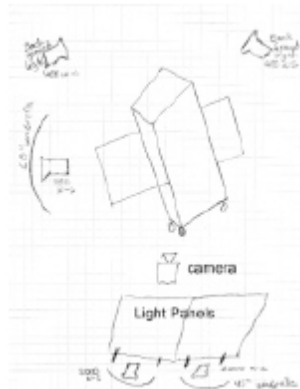
Lighting a Large Product

There is more to shooting large product than just backing off your lights. Large products are often not just big, they're also heavy. I had a machine that I had to get into the studio that was so heavy the wheels sunk into the asphalt in the parking lot. If you want to shoot a lot of big product, and this is a good business, you will want a big studio. It would be good if the studio is on the ground floor of a building and has a drive up cargo door. This can be tough to find. I know a lot of photographers who only do large product at the clients' location. This limits the photographers overhead nicely, but it can also limit your image making. We will start with large product in this lesson, then work on shooting on location and finally talk about how you get to a location.



Belco Heat Sealing
Machine

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Belco Heat Sealing
Machine Diagram

© John H. Siskin

The first product is a heat-sealing machine. It is about 6 feet long and almost 5 feet high. The important characteristics of the machine are the orange logo color, the sliding shelf that serves the oven, and the dials. Remember that the client is coming to us to help him communicate information about the product. Of course the client also wants it to look good! The first step for me, in setting up a product shot is to establish the location of the camera and its orientation to the product. This product was very difficult to move, first it was heavy, but it also marked up the seamless. Since this was a film shot we didn't want to do that, as the client would see the marks. I should point out that a 4X5 camera and tripod can also be difficult to move. The key to finding the right position was the gauges and the printing on the side of the orange oven. Remember it is important to think your shot through. This saves a lot of time and trouble.

In order to create a shot that will show this product in a good light we need a large soft light source. To me, that means light panels. In this case I used two light panels, with umbrellas, to light the long side of the product. This means that the side is very evenly lit and has a minimum level of shadows. A very large light source can practically eliminate shadows, but only when it is very close to the product. In this case the light source is about 7 feet wide, and it is quite a few feet from the product. After all I have to keep it out of the picture. I could have used a 6 foot softbox to do the same thing, but that would have been a very expensive soft box!

I also used an umbrella on the right side of the camera; this made the right side of the oven lighter than the front of the machine. This helps to define the shape of the machine. Finally I had light coming in on both sides of the background, this gives the background a little gradation. I should mention that the background is a 12 foot wide grey seamless. The 12-foot-wide seamless is very helpful with large products.



U-Build Table #1

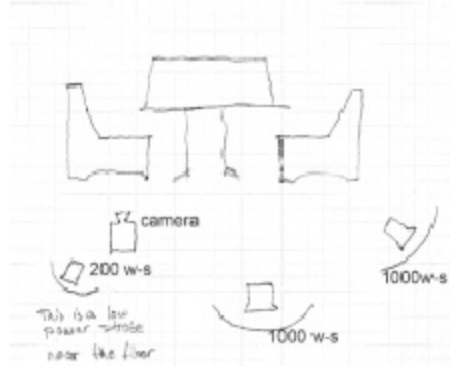
Shows the reflections of the umbrellas. Because a fast shutter speed was used the light outside is blocked, even

though this was taken in
daylight. Exposure was about
f22-32 @ 1/250 with a 90mm
lens

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U-Build image 2
look out the window!
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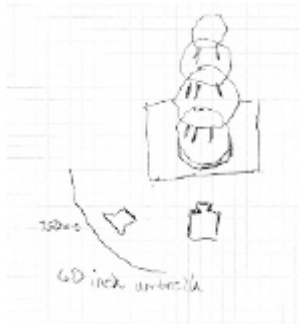
U-Build #2
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This shot was made for U-Build, a company that sells plans for furniture. The product is the booth and table. This is a great shot for showing a few things about working on location. In the first shot you can see my umbrellas in the windows. This is a good place to point out that you need only keep things out of the part of the image you are using. We'll talk more about controlling window reflections in a later lesson. You'll note that these problems are not visible in shot #2; they were simply cropped out. Once again this is a three light shot using umbrellas. There is a 30 inch umbrella near the floor and just to camera left. This does not show in the windows of course. This helps to lift the shadows that would otherwise be on the floor and side of the bench. The thing I really want to point out is the difference in the background in these two shots.

These images were made within a few minutes of each other; the only difference is a change in the shutter speed. The shutter speed does not affect the strobes only the existing light. In the first shot the shutter speed is 1/250th of a second. The second shot was taken at 1/15th of a second. The client was able to decide whether the addition of the backyard drew too much attention from the product. You can tell that I often use just umbrellas on location, they are quick and easy to work with.



Wedding Cake
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Wedding Cake
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I just wanted to throw in a shot to point out that location work can be very tasty! The only real difficulty with this shot is to keep the window free of reflections. This is only one light a 60 inch umbrella to the left of the camera. As with the last shot you need to get the shutter speed right in order to make the background look right. Remember, in a shot like this you will get a significant amount of light from the window. This light helps to open up the flowers and glasses on the table. Another point, usually I want a lot of depth of field when shooting product, but not in this shot. I wanted to keep the background out of focus. So, here I used less light. This also made it easier to get window to balance with the strobes. This seems much nicer than shooting on a white background and cutting out the product!

Doing Business with a Business

I am not a lawyer. I will not give you advice about how to write a contract that will hold up in court. I do hope to help you to build a relationship with your client that will enable you to define the job and the purpose of the photographs. For information that will stand up in court I suggest that you go to ASMP - www.asmp.org. ASMP has publications and other information that are legal. You can find a good model release on their website as well. I think the whole purpose of defining the job is to stay out of court. Any job that ends up in court is hard to describe as good business. If you define certain aspects of the job before it starts, it will help you do the job well.

Here are the elements that you and the client need to agree upon before that job starts. What you are going to photograph. What you will deliver to the client. When you will shoot. When you will deliver. How much you will be paid. How you will be paid. What happens if things do not go well? Finally who owns or controls the finished images. Although you can get a pre-written contract that will define some of these matters, there are problems in using such a contract. These problems include the fact that these contracts are often aggressive, so they may disturb your client. You may think of the finished document as a proposal, an estimate or a contract, but it will help

you have a good business relationship with your client. You can use this information like a checklist when you begin a project.

The biggest problem that occurs with clients is that they do not understand what they want to buy. The first part of this problem is that we, as photographers, are selling our time. That means our expertise and the use of the equipment as well as the hours spent pushing the shutter button. Most clients think they are buying photographs or digital files. Part of the problem with this misunderstanding is that if a client isn't ready to shoot on time, they don't see that as a budget buster. I do.

1. **What is the job?** Client needs 800 product shots. I want to know how many angles for each product and what sorts of things they are. I want to know if the size will be similar. I will generally give the client a per-unit price, so that if there are 900 units I get more money. If the job is shooting a kitchen, I want to know how many shots the client expects, and how the shot will be used. If the client only needs the shot for the web, I may be able to do the job quicker than if the need is for a magazine. Regardless, I need to define the job. One advantage of this is that clients generally won't expect extras for free if you define what the job is. I need to know what size and quality of file the client needs. I need to know if the client expects the files to have post work done.
2. **The date and time of the shoot are critical.** You **MUST** arrive at the time you stated. You must tell the client how long you will be unloading and setting up. The client should understand at what point you expect to begin billing. I generally bill for set-up time and not for packing up. I don't want to have to rush packing because of the client's budget. If the client wants to reschedule, I will do so, with no additional cost, with 48 hours notice. Remember, I sell time.
3. **Arrange the date you will deliver.** This is important to the client, so be responsible. If there is a problem, communicate with the client as soon as possible.
4. **Arrange how you will be paid** - not just how much, but when and in what manner. In general, I get a deposit, before shooting starts. Keep in mind that you are doing custom work; you can't sell auto parts shots to another buyer. Arrange when the balance will be due; most businesses can cut a check in less than 2 weeks. A really large business - say Disney or General Motors - will have a program for payment. There is no reason that you shouldn't be able to find out what this is. With a large business, bill exactly the way they tell you to. Purchase order numbers are very important.
5. **When things don't work** (say, the client isn't ready when you get there): They should know how that will change the price. Some days I

have problems, too. So I tell the client that if the work is not usable (usable is defined as did you use it?), then I have the option to redo or refund. I will specifically state that I am not liable for costs incurred in setting up the shoot. The most I will refund is the deposit. This hasn't happened very often. When there is a problem, it is usually because I didn't define the job well.

6. **Ownership:** What can your client do, and what can you do, with the images? Although very large companies often dictate this, generally it is negotiable. I want my client to have the right to reproduce the images in any way except selling the images as images. This means that the client can use the images to promote the business in print or on the web, as they choose. But if they sell the image to another person or business, they need to arrange a payment to me. So if I do a construction job for a contractor, and the client wants to sell the image to the cabinetmaker, I should get some money. I want to retain the right to use the images for self-promotion, and any additional sales, so that I can sell to the cabinetmaker. Often the client will want to make sure the images are not sold to his competitors, and this is very reasonable.

Obviously, there may be other issues specific to the job you are doing. The key thing is that I want to work and the client wants photos, so we should be able to make a reasonable deal.

For more information about lighting tools, check this article:
www.siskinphoto.com/magazine/zpdf/toolsoflighting.pdf

Your Assignment: Photograph a Large Product

Shoot a large product - even an oversized box would be okay. Furniture would be a good choice. Your goal is to make a three-dimensional representation of the product. Shoot at least 2 angles and shoot your set-up. Your goal is to do a shot you could show to a potential client. You can use a phone to shoot your setups, which might make it easier to document your shots. Submit the **two shots of different angles - plus set-up shots or diagrams** - to the Campus Square by Wednesday, October 16, 2013.

And don't forget, I would like to see **three to six** of your favorite previously created images uploaded to your Portfolio in addition to this first assignment. I won't be critiquing these Portfolio images but I would still like to see some of your previous work. Upload both your Portfolio and assignment images following the instructions (which you should have already received in a separate email).

If you have any questions, send me an [email](#) or post a question on the online [Q&A forums](#).

Have a good time. Send me some questions.

Thanks!

John

If you'd like me to critique your assignment you can arrange that at my website. Please visit www.siskinphoto.com/workshop.php . I suppose you could also make a donation at the site.

Have a good time.

Please scroll down to see a large group of additional information from this class. Trust me some of it is really good stuff!

John

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Business e---mail 1

Getting business might be the hardest part of doing business. I don't have all the answers, so what I am going to share are some answers, the one I think might work now. I really want this to be a give and take part of the course, so I have started a thread called marketing on the Q&A section of the class. I will post information about how to send html mail there, so that is a good incentive to visit the thread. I am going to break the problem down into parts; I hope that will help.

The first problem is: who are you going to do business for? While you might be skilled in a number of different types of photography, no one is skilled at everything. If you do an honest inventory of your skills it will help you to find clients that are a good fit. At the same time you should look at how businesses use images: advertising, websites, annual reports, documentation and so on. Remember that you are a resource to a business; it is better if you can be an expert resource.

I suggest that you start by looking for businesses. You should use the net, looking at chamber of commerce site and business searches. You should also check out the phone book. Collect information as you do this, particularly addresses, e---mail addresses, web sites and contact names. Your clients are not going to find you spontaneously; you have to do the work to find them.

Passive advertising

The yellow pages used to be a very important part of my marketing. I don't do any advertising in them any more. In my market, Los Angeles, the yellow pages are useless for commercial photography. They may still work in your market. See who is advertising in the pages, and how big the ads are. Yellow page ads are expensive, and they bill you even if you don't get clients.

Your web site is very important. If your site makes you look like a fine art photographer it will work against you, as a commercial photographer. It's possible a fine art site can help you book weddings. If you plan on doing family portraits and working for business you will probably need two websites. Display work that seems to fit your prospective clients' needs. I prefer a relatively simple site. You can visit my site: www.siskinphoto.com

Portfolio sites, there are a bunch of these. Like goportfolio.com and portfolios.com. I don't know if any of these sites are worth the time spent uploading to them. I am on a few, without results. If you know of any that work please send the names.

Bidding sites, these are sites that companies list jobs on. You enter a bid. For most jobs the work will be done inexpensively overseas, but occasionally a local job comes up. Check out guru.com and getafreelancer.com. If you know of any others please share. I have gotten work off of one of these, and you don't have to bid on things you don't want.

Craig's List, it doesn't take a lot of time to do an ad for the list. I have one at my ftp space that I post to the list. I have gotten a number of jobs from Craig's list, and it's free.

Active advertising:

Html e---mail, this is my favorite method. Use all those e---mail addresses you found and send basically web pages. You can send a page where the pictures are where you intend them to be and the page has live links to your webpage. Just a great way to promote yourself. I will send out a sample during the class.

Social networking, this probably helps with weddings. I don't know about commercial work. I am on facebook, I hope it is helping me reach more students. I think a key is to update frequently. I am still new at this. Suggestions are welcome.

Post cards, these do work. Probably the best thing you can use as direct mail is a post card. This is expensive, but if you have the capital worth considering. Check out Modern Postcard.

Cold calling, frankly I hate doing this. Also it is noxious to receive cold calls, BUT, at ad agencies and other places where they buy photography, it is some bodies job to talk to you. If you are able to do this, remember that your call may not be important to someone. Get off the phone before you annoy someone unnecessarily

Visiting clients, this can work if the circumstances are right. For instance if there is a convention of target clients, you can visit and hand out cards. In Los Angeles there are several buildings where the people in certain businesses are located. So there is a fashion building and a place where home designers are located. If you walk through and hand out cards it would be good. Of course basic politeness should be observed.

Basically what I want you to do here is suggest things that might work for marketing. Also if you have information about portfolio sites or bidding sites or just comments please apply them to this thread. Please know that I may use effective ideas or resources to this thread for future classes. If you don't want that to happen please say something in your post.

Now on to HTML mail. Basically this is a way to mail a web page, in fact you can mail a webpage. Keep in mind that your recipient can't see any page that has Java or Flash, properly. Work with a simple page. Links will work. So if your front page is simple you can use that. Mine won't work because I have JavaScript in a couple of places. You can code a page, but since it is for e-mail you should use HTML4. This is annoying, as HTML4 is an older style of code. If you code properly you can define the color of links and the color of your background. The thing that seems to go wrong, if you use a regular page, is the color of the background and the links. It is best to send a page that is only 600 to 800 pixels wide, since many people do not have their e-mail reader set very wide. Frankly sending a regular page is not that bad. Whatever you try to send test it first.

This is a way to do this with Windows:

On a PC with Internet Explorer and Outlook, open the HTML email page by using Internet Explorer and going to "File>Open" Or just use a page that is open in the browser.

Once the email newsletter is open, still using Internet Explorer, go to "File>Sent>Page by Email" and you should be done.

And for Mac:

Open the saved document with Safari and at the menu bar, go to File and select Mail Contents of This Page.

The rendered document with Safari will be copied to a new Mail.app message that will be sent in its entirety.

Be SURE to use BCC if you send to a group. There will be a limit to how many messages you can send in a day or your ISP will get upset. I usually don't send more than 150 per day. You should put in an opt---out link, something like "if you don't want to receive press here", or "return with remove in the subject line".

Thanks, John

Shooting Tethered to the Computer, e---mail 2

Most DSLR cameras will allow you to shoot with the camera tethered to a computer. The advantage of this is that you can evaluate your image with the larger screen of the computer rather than the small LCD screen on the camera. Also you sometimes have access to more information with a tethered program, like a histogram. This is critical when you are working with lighting. Personally, I am unable to evaluate the subtleties of lighting on a face, or a building or a product: where the highlights are, how the light gradates across the subject and the catch lights, on a screen with a 3 inch diagonal. In addition to looking at the image you will want to check out the histogram, as it gives you information about exposure.

Most of the camera companies offer software and cables to accomplish this. Canon includes this with the software bundle, unfortunately, since I am not a Canon user, I do not know where they hide it. Nikon charges you extra for this on some models, you need software called: Nikon Camera Control Pro. I don't believe Sony offers tethered shooting, but I could be wrong. There are also wireless options, but I haven't found a need for them.

If I am shooting architectural image, particularly interiors, I will shoot everything tethered; I would do the same thing for a product shoot. When I shoot people I do all my set---up shots tethered, then do the rest of the shoot with the camera capturing to the internal flash card. This gives me the advantage of the additional information from the tethered system when I adjust the lighting and other aspects of my image. But, I

shoot with the camera capture since it is faster, and I don't have a cord going to the computer.

Histogram:

The histogram is a mathematical representation of the exposure information. It shows how much of each density you have in a photograph. So if you took a picture of a just a gray card, with out anything else in the picture, the histogram would show a spike in the middle of the graph and nothing any where else on the graph. If your shot is all of one density, this histogram shows you that you have pixels in that density; this would be a boring picture. Now if you gave the same shot more light, overexposing the image, the spike would move towards the right side of the graph, because the right side represents lighter density pixels. If you removed light from the shot the spike would move left showing darker pixels. I hope this makes sense. But what can we say about a shot with a lot of different density pixels in it? Well, first, if the raised portions of the graph, which represent the number of pixels of a given density, are not cut off on the left or right side, then you have made an image that has all the information about the shot on the sensor. This exposure may or may not be perfect, but if you shot in raw then you can easily make the exposure perfect in a raw processing program. Note I said perfect, not good enough. If you expect to see black, without detail or white, without detail in your finished shot then you should expect to see the information in the graph pushed against the left side of the graph for black and the right side for white. Here is the problem: what if the information is pushed up against the right side of the graph, and you DO NOT want to see white without detail. Your shot is over exposed. You need to reduce the amount of light in the shot. If this is an ambient light shot adjust either the aperture or the shutter speed, or both, to let in less light. If this is an exposure made with strobes adjust either the aperture, the power of the strobes, or the ISO. If the information in the graph is pushed against the left side add light, or sensitivity, rather than reduce it. Really with practice it should take only seconds to evaluate a histogram and decide what to do.

SHOOT IN RAW!

Portfolio e---mail 3

I have had dozens of portfolios over the years with hundreds of individual prints. The purpose of each portfolio was to demonstrate my skills and talents to a perspective client. By skills I mean technical abilities and craft. So that I might want a client to know that I can take pictures with a microscope or that I can light interiors. I would include images that demonstrated a high degree of skill with these techniques. My talents would be the way I approach and see a job, so that I might want the client to know that I am good with shots of hands working or that I often shoot buildings from unusual angles. Once again I might want a client to see images that demonstrate this. Finally I said "a perspective client," each time I show the portfolio I choose the prints I bring with me for THAT potential client. I have used a variety of boxes and cases and books to hold portfolios over the years, but each one shares this characteristic: it can be customized for each showing. I don't want to find myself saying: "Well, this doesn't really apply to what you do, but..."

The portfolio is not a description of my limitations or challenges or failures. So you should never present an image with the narrative: "This shot would be better if..." Clients do not want to risk their ad budget on your first experience with a certain kind of image. For instance I have never had a client pay for me to shoot from a helicopter. I have had several clients who would have been well served with a helicopter shot, but, if the client decides to make this shot, the client will use someone else. If I really felt that this kind of work would be worthwhile for my business I would need to pay for a ride on a helicopter. I would have to prove that I know what to do with a helicopter. There is another side of this problem: there are clients who won't believe that you can shoot for them unless you have done EXACTLY what they want done. There is a good chance that if you show a good variety of related work and show quality that you will get their confidence, but not always.

I used to use pages with 4X5 and 8X10 transparencies mounted in laminated sheets, very impressive. I used transparencies (think big slides) because they were what was used for printing. Part of what I needed to prove to a client was that I knew how to create an effective transparency for printing. The reason that I point this out is that I still need to prove to the client that my images print well. Often a client has seen an image on the web, or from their own camera, that looks good on

the monitor and prints poorly. If you don't show prints you may not get the confidence of the client. Prints show more detail than a monitor. In addition, if you are meeting with a client, and use your laptop, how will you be presenting the work. Are you using some sort of a slide show? Then the client can't easily stop on an image. Are you going to stand over the clients shoulder and control the computer? This seems too intimate to me. Prints allow the client to look at the images at his/her pace. Another advantage, I make prints in house, so the cost is low, and I can make another print easily. This means if a client likes an image, I can just leave it with her/him. I put a label on the back of each image with my name and contact information, just so I can do this.

I also often show some large prints, particularly to contractors and home designers. The reason I show these is that these oversized prints can be effective marketing tools for this sort of client. If I want to sell a product, and these clients buy this product, I need to show this product. Consider how a landscaper will show your work, he is selling a new design for a half--acre lot, and will he make that sale with a small print?

Of course we also show are images on the web and in presentations to groups. In situations like these we can't customize the presentation to an audience of one. But to the extent we can customize our appearance we should. So a web site that presents you as a fine artist, may work against you as a commercial photographer. People refer to this as branding, that is telling potential clients a single message. While I don't think that my site does this very well, it does feature my commercial work more prominently than fine---art work.

Metering e---mail 4

Here is the deal about metering, some similar information is in the class. The model for how a meter is used was created when photographers used film. This means that we did not have instant feedback and that each and every capture had a price. When I shot 4X5 film each sheet cost close to four dollars. If that doesn't sound like a lot of money multiply it by the number of times you pressed the shutter button on your last shoot. So in order to better predict the outcome of our shots we used both Polaroid and a meter. BOTH, not just the meter. I have so often had students demand that the meter create perfect exposures, without ever

actually examining their own images. If you want to use a meter you can, but the meter CANNOT be relied upon, it is much too stupid a tool. The photographer must examine his/her images by the best means possible in order to determine light placement and the nature of the light modifiers and light power. No meter can do this for you. Nor will any formula do as good a job as the educated eye and mind. So if you have a light on the right side of the head that reads f8 and the other side reads f5.6 the first side is twice as bright as the other, a 2:1 ratio, but how does it look? If you shoot an image with a digital camera, then change the exposure and light balance in order to get a good result is this significantly different from using a meter then shooting an image to check light balance and so on? This is where an educated eye is more important than a simple piece of technology.

A histogram is designed to give you information about the light values in your shot. As such it is giving you more information than a meter, which only tells you how to make medium gray. As you said you expect the histogram for an image that is supposed to be high key to look different from a more standard shot. The histogram does not give you the final exposure for your shot. Instead you shoot in raw, using the histogram to confirm that you have the information you need. You choose your final exposure when you convert from raw to the final file. Even that exposure can be easily changed in curves. When I shot transparencies the exposure had to be perfect on the final transparency, which was difficult. Now we have these tools, preview images histogram, raw and so on, to create a perfect exposure. It makes sense to use the tools.

Now we have the ability to preview an image instantly, review a histogram and capture in raw, we can create a perfect exposure, without a meter. It makes sense to use the tools in our digital cameras. We'll have more about these tools as the class continues.

Editing e---mail 5

Editing photographs is not only difficult, sometimes it is heart wrenching. Often each image seems a special and unique expression of your creative vision, how can you bare to part with even one. Get over it; this feeling is personal. No one else will ever experience your photographs the way you do. You remember the day, what happened before and after, you remember the client and you remember whether

you got paid. The viewer doesn't experience any of this, and for the photograph to be effective for the viewer you have to give him/her an image they can perceive in their own terms. That is the purpose of editing. I am going to attach a photograph I made to this e---mail. I designed and built the camera that made the image. Because of that intimacy no one else will ever perceive the shot in the way I do. I hope they will like it, but they will inevitably have a different feel for the image. You may think editing is time consuming, and it is, but it will make you a better photographer.

The first step in editing is shooting. You need to shoot a lot of images. The last head shot job I did was around 300 images, on a product job I might shoot only 2 images. Since we are now working in digital it is important to always shoot that extra image, or extra dozen images. It is always easier to shoot more than it is to go back. Although Eisenstaedt was famous for just taking a few shots, we will do better not to emulate him.

In order to edit effectively we need to be ruthless. The first step is to remove everything that is clearly a mistake. With a portrait type job this is generally pretty easy. A mistake is an image that has no real focus. A mistake is an image that is out of focus. A mistake is an image that is not focused on the subject. A mistake is an image that is blurry. If you shoot in raw a shot doesn't have to be perfectly exposed, but if the shot is two stops from perfect exposure the shot is a mistake. If the strobes didn't go off it is a mistake. Get rid of all this stuff, you should have plenty more images. I understand the Photoshop CS 15 will be able to fix everything, but that hasn't happened yet. Photoshop 16 will be able to make your entire childhood perfect. Yes there are many mistakes you could fix, but you could spend days working in Photoshop. It is better to move through the process quickly. But you might as well save these images somewhere.

Step two is to get rid of everything that makes the subject look like a doofus. So that shot where the subject is checking out your shoes? Gone. At the same time you should part with all the shot where you awkwardly cut off body parts, hands cut in half and so on. Yes a lot of these shots could be saved. If you shot enough you shouldn't need to save them.

This should do it for negative editing; that is removing images because of problems. With any luck you have removed anywhere from 20 to 50 percent of your shots. Good. The other thing you have to do is to look at all of the images that are left at least twice, well you went through the images twice didn't you? That familiarity with your images is going to help a lot in the next go round. When you look through the images this time, look for images that are particularly fine, not just acceptable. They should have something special they may need cropping or other minor work, but the quality of your vision should be apparent. Also you want to look at the images as if you didn't shoot them, as if you were seeing them not editing them. Look for an image that really connects. Certainly you can keep images you are unsure about, but you should end up with less than 10 percent of the images you started with.

I do this in Adobe Bridge. As I go through each step I display the images larger, so that I get a better feel for the shots. The next step is to bring the images into Adobe Raw. Raw gives me a better look at each image, and I can begin the image processing. In raw I can do batch corrections on color, contrast, saturation and so on. I can also crop my images and do a variety of individual corrections. I will do my final choices on editing in raw. An image may get left behind at this point for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it is something I could fix, but don't want to, or perhaps two images are the same.

Finally I will open up all of the images that made it through raw in Photoshop. While I will rarely remove an image from the group in Photoshop I will perfect the images in Photoshop. This is where I will sharpen and do other detail work. Now finally, if the client asks for just these shots (not likely on a head shot) and I don't have any personal reasons to make a choice, I can say enie minie more....

Business e---mail---6

I am not a lawyer. I will not give you advice about how to write a contract that will hold up in court. I do hope to help you to build a relationship with your client that will enable you to define the job and the purpose of the photographs. For information that will stand up in court I suggest that you go to A.S.M.P. (www.asmp.org) they have publications and other information that are legal. You can find a good

model release on their website as well. I think the whole purpose of defining the job is to stay out of court. Any job that ends up in court is hard to describe as good business. If you define certain aspects of the job before it starts, it will help you do the job well.

Here are the elements that you and the client need to agree upon before that job starts. What you are going to photograph. What you will deliver to the client. When you will shoot. When you will deliver. How much you will be paid. How you will be paid. What happens if things do not go well? Finally who owns or controls the finished images. Although you can get a pre-written contract that will define some of these matters, there are problems in using such a contract. These problems include the fact that these contracts are often aggressive, so they may disturb your client. You may think of the finished document as a proposal, an estimate or a contract, but it will help you have a good business relationship with your client. You can use this information like a checklist when you begin a project.

The biggest problem that occurs with clients is that they do not understand what they want to buy. The first part of this problem is that we, as photographers, are selling our time. That means our expertise and the use of the equipment as well as the hours spent pushing the shutter button. Most clients think they are buying photographs or digital files. Part of the problem with this misunderstanding is that if a client isn't ready to shoot on time, they don't see that as a budget buster. I do.

- 1) What is the job? Client needs 800 product shots. I want to know how many angles of each product and what sorts of things they are. I want to know if the size will be similar. I will generally give the client a per unit price, so that if there are 900 units I get more money. If the job is shooting a kitchen, I want to know how many shots the client expects, and how the shot will be used. If the client only needs the shot for the web I may be able to do the job quicker than if the need is for a magazine. Regardless I need to define the job. One advantage of this is that clients generally won't expect extras for free if you define what the job is. I need to know what size and quality of file the client needs. I need to know if the client expects the files to have post work done.

- 2) The date and time of the shoot are critical. You MUST arrive at the time you stated. You must tell the client how long you will be unloading and setting up. The client should understand at what point you expect to begin billing. I generally bill for set---up time and not for packing up. I don't want to have to rush packing because of the client's budget. If the client wants to reschedule I will do so, with no additional cost, with 48 hours notice.
Remember I sell time.
- 3) Arrange the date you will deliver. This is important to the client, so be responsible. If there is a problem communicate with the client as soon as possible.
- 4) Arrange how you will be paid. Not just how much, but when and in what manner. In general I get a deposit, before shooting starts. Remember you are doing custom work; you can't sell auto parts shots to another buyer. Arrange when the balance will be due; most businesses can cut a check in less than 2 weeks. A really large business, say Disney or General Motors will have a program for payment. There is no reason that you shouldn't be able to find out what this is. With a large business bill exactly the way they tell you to. Purchase order numbers are very important.
- 5) When things don't work, say the client isn't ready when you get there. They should know how that will change the price. Some days I have problems, too. So I tell the client that if the work is not usable (usable is defined as did you use it?) then I have the option to redo or refund. I will specifically state that I am not liable for costs incurred in setting up the shoot. The most I will refund is the deposit. This hasn't happened very often. When there is a problem it is usually because I didn't define the job well.
- 6) Ownership. What can your client do, and what can you do, with the images. Although very large companies often dictate this, generally it is negotiable. I want my client to have the right to reproduce the images in any way except selling the images as images. This means that the client can use the images to promote the business in print or on the web, as they choose. But if they sell the image to another person or business they need to arrange a payment to me. So if I do a construction job for a contractor, and the client wants to sell the image to the cabinetmaker, I should get some money. I want to retain the right to use the images for self--promotion, and any additional sales, so that I can sell to the

cabinetmaker. Often the client will want to make sure the images are not sold to his competitors, and this is very reasonable.

Obviously there may be other issues specific to the job you are doing. The key thing is that I want to work and the client wants photos, so we should be able to make a reasonable deal.

Hope you found something useful in these additional messages.
John

Please remember that you can arrange for me to critique your assignment at my website. Please visit

www.siskinphoto.com/workshop.php . I suppose you could also make a donation at the site.